

ARTS NOTES

Prestigious quartet delights audience

By John Shulson
Correspondent

The Williamsburg Library Theater stage was on fire March 14, thanks to the Dover Quartet and the Chamber Music Society.

The playing by this dynamite ensemble, critically called “the next Guarneri ... they’re that good,” certainly proved accurate. From 2008 on, the Dover has claimed high stake awards everywhere and skyrocketed to fame. To have this prestigious ensemble here was a treat.

This was a case of four players (Joel Link and Bryan Lee, violin; Hezekiah Leung, viola; Camden Shaw, cello) perfectly attuned to each other’s musical minds and artistic sensitivities, offering rich, burnished sounds, impeccable technique and high style. The playing was superbly coordinated and nuanced and, at times, mesmerizing. The program was quite pleasantly balanced, opening with Haydn’s String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 33, No. 2, a jolly piece so typical of Haydn.

The performance was one big smile, such as Haydn can produce, three of the four movements lilting, jovial and brisk, the Largo being effectively solemn.

As for its subtitle “The Joke” — the major one being the finale where closing lines ended and, after a pause, started and ended and started again and so forth — it was truly a joke that the audience relished and

rewarded with great applause.

The evening’s “find” was a work by a not readily recalled composer — George Walker and his String Quartet No. 1. Born in 1922, he studied at Oberlin, Curtis and Eastman and was the first Black American to win the 1966 Pulitzer for music. A prolific composer, his quartet is known for its exquisite adagio, popularly called “Lyric for Strings.” This movement has the mark of Samuel Barber, his teacher at Curtis, all over it. Much like Barber’s “Adagio,” it’s cast in exquisite, ethereal and passionate passages, qualities thoroughly embraced by the Dover. (Incidentally, the Dover is named after Barber and his “Dover Beach.”)

The adagio contrasts with the bookend movements that, while dissonant and angular, are effectively balanced by tonal structure reflecting his being influenced by Ravel and Debussy. It all makes and made for exciting and engaging listening.

The program closed with Mendelssohn’s String Quartet No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 44, No. 33, a work of substantial happiness and sizzle. The five-movement work is rich in melody, spirit and flowing lines. The Scherzo was trademark Mendelssohn, its very first sounds bringing to mind his incidental music to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” lines scurrying all over the place in gleeful unity. Like his “Octet,” this work builds and builds to a pyrotechnic climax.

It was one of those breathtaking moments,

one of heightened accomplishment and glory, one that brought a spontaneous standing applause and vocal shouts of approval. Pretty crazy good.

Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra

Jason Vieaux is considered royalty in the classical guitar world, a highly acclaimed, abundantly talented, virtuoso-loaded performer. Oh, yeah, and a collaborator with crème of the crop musicians and a recording artist whose album “Play” won a 2015 Instrumental Classical Solo Grammy Award.

His appearance on the WSO’s March 16 program in Williamsburg’s Community Chapel was all it was anticipated to be: brilliant. He played two of the guitar repertoire’s most well-known works, Vivaldi’s Guitar Concerto in D and Rodrigo’s “Concierto de Aranjuez.”

The Vivaldi is Vivaldi, lively and finger-tricky business, appealing harmonic structures, a sort of mini-version of “Four Seasons.”

Its “Largo” is by far the portion most popularly known for its compelling legato line that. Similarly, the “Concierto” is Rodrigo’s most popular and oft-heard work. It’s got catchy rhythms, nice orchestral interplay and the warm spirit of Spain. The adagio’s lines are rich, sultry, luxurious and

(for oldsters like me) readily associated with those Chrysler commercials eons ago where Ricardo Montalban seductively described the allure of “fine or rich Corinthian leather,” as the Largo’s lines played softly in the background.

Vieaux brought to these landmark works a beautiful tone, virtuoso skills of the highest degree and artistic sensitivity that reinforced his internationally stellar acclaim as a masterful musician/guitarist and one of the most talented guitarists of his generation. The instrument, by nature, is not a big sound one. Music director Michael Buttermann’s balance between both reduced strings and full orchestra and Vieaux was the absolute, most total perfection of balance one could ask for. It simply could not get any better. Bravo to all.

Rounding off the evening was the Brahms Symphony No. 3. This is a work of rich colors and emotions, interweaving themes, drama, sensitivity, lyricism and peacefulness. It was Brahms — truly enough said.

Buttermann and company beautifully shaped the work, its lines and sensations captivating attention, checking all the boxes for cohesion, clarity, blended sound, truly fine playing and nothing-left-to-be-desired excellence.

Have information about arts in the Historic Triangle? Contact John Shulson at johnshulson@gmail.com.

2 students injured, bus driver hospitalized after school bus crash

By Sian Wilkerson
Staff Writer

JAMES CITY — A Matthew Whaley Elementary school bus carrying students was involved in a two-vehicle collision in James City County on Tuesday morning.

The collision, which also involved a pickup truck, occurred around 9:20 a.m. at the intersection of South Henry Street and Humelsine Parkway.

“There was an error to yield or follow the proper procedures at a light and those vehicles collided, causing pretty significant

damage” to the vehicles, according to county police spokesman Tayleb Brooks.

Based on preliminary information, the driver of the truck failed to yield, Brooks said. Police are still investigating.

As a result of the collision, the bus driver was taken to a local hospital, and two students suffered minor injuries. Another bus, as well as a number of parents, arrived on the scene to pick up and transport the remaining students.

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Van Gogh show coming to Virginia Beach this summer

By Colin Warren-Hicks
Staff Writer

The highly anticipated traveling art show “Beyond Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience” is coming to Virginia Beach this summer.

The show aims to provide viewers with a sensory overload, seeking to bring more than 300 of Vincent Van Gogh’s paintings to life by taking the masterworks off the two-dimensional canvas and projecting them in three-dimensional forms. It was such a hit in Washington, D.C., that its run in the nation’s capital had to be extended through May of this year. Presented in partnership with Virginia Arts Festival, “Beyond Van Gogh” will open July 6 at the Virginia Beach Convention Center.

Tickets go on sale Thursday.

Colin Warren-Hicks, 919-818-8139, colin.warrenhicks@virginiamedia.com

If you go

When: July 6 – Sept. 2, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday. 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Friday and Saturday. 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday.

Where: Virginia Beach Convention Center in Exhibit Hall A, 1000 19th St. in Virginia Beach.

Tickets: Start at \$33.99 for adults and \$23.99 for children (ages 5-15)

Details: vangoghvirginiabeach.com

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